

Columbus (GA) Ledger-Enquirer
November 6, 2003

Soldier Helps Iraqis With School Supplies

Sheri Matis runs local effort to aid nation's kids

By Mick Walsh, Staff Writer

Sgt. 1st Class Danny DeNormandie had been in war-torn Iraq only a few weeks when he became aware the supply shortage.

No, there wasn't a lack of protective vests, MREs, bug repellent or ammo for the 101st Airborne.

What platoon leader DeNormandie discovered, from talking to Iraqi nationals, was that the Mosul educational system was desperately in need of school supplies.

So he fired off a series of e-mails to family and friends, including his Columbus girlfriend Sheri Matis, asking them to chip in and send a couple of boxes of supplies to the Iraqi kids.

"Danny told me he thought he could make a difference in the lives of the kids who came into his compound every day," said Matis, the adult development manager of the Girl Scouts of the Concharty Council. "He said they had textbooks, but nothing else."

That was all he needed say.

Matis took it from there.

"First thing I did was turn his request into a Girl Scout service project," she said earlier this week from her 13th Avenue office. Then she enlisted the help of her brother, Carl Matis of Cumming, Ga.

Between the two, more than 100 cases of supplies, everything from notebook paper to glue, color markers to crayons, have been shipped off to Mosul and distributed to the local school system.

"I know that's just a drop in the bucket for what they need," said Sheri Matis, "but we're not finished yet, either."

Matis, whose daughter Ashley attends Hardaway High School, had followed the success of "Operation We Care" during the first few weeks of Operation Iraqi Freedom.

That's the project, conceived by Army wife Jennifer Manchester, that sent hundreds of packages of food, bug spray, toilet paper and other necessities to our troops in Iraq and Kuwait.

Matis quickly learned that getting the supplies was the easy part, and least expensive.

"It's the mailing that's expensive," she said.

That's where Carl Matis, who works for a hydraulics company in Suwanee, comes in.

"He's been able to get companies and individuals to pick up the cost of all the shipping," he said. "He even talked the arts and crafts company Plaid into donating four pickup truck loads of stuff. That was close to 100 cases right there."

DeNormandie, a Fort Benning drill sergeant before being transferred to Fort Campbell, Ky., earlier this year, isn't expected home any time soon.

"I think working on what we call 'Operation Iraqi Children' helps me keep my mind off the fact that he's in Iraq and that the war is still going on," Matis said. "I know that he has a big heart when it comes to children and that he'll do whatever he can to help the children of Iraq."